

# Menu Planning for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The information below helps menu planners meet the NSLP meal pattern requirements and encourage student selections of reimbursable meals with offer versus serve (OVS).



**MEAL PATTERN:** All lunch menus must meet minimum **daily** and **weekly** requirements. The weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates are not required but should be used as a planning tool to assist in offering balanced meals that meet the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat and sodium. For more information on the lunch meal patterns, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Five-day Weeks](#) and [Meal Patterns for Seven-day Weeks](#) Web pages, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Questions and Answers on the Final Rule](#).



**MILK:** Only low-fat (1%) unflavored and fat-free unflavored or flavored milk may be served. Schools must offer at least 1 cup daily for all grades, and must include a **variety** of milk (at least two different choices of fat content or flavor).



**FRUITS:** The fruits component includes fresh fruit, frozen fruit (with or without added sugar), canned fruit in light syrup, water or juice and dried fruit. Schools must offer at least ½ cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. All fruits credit based on the actual volume served except dried fruit, which credits as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of dried fruit credits as ½ cup of fruit.



**VEGETABLES:** The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen and canned vegetables. Schools must offer at least ¾ cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. Menus must include minimum weekly amounts of **five vegetable subgroups**: dark green, red/orange, beans/peas (legumes), starchy and other. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Vegetable Subgroups](#). All vegetables credit based on volume except raw leafy greens, which credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup of raw leafy greens equals ½ cup of vegetables.



**JUICE:** Fruit and vegetable juice must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice. Fruit juice cannot exceed **half** of the weekly fruit offerings and vegetable juice cannot exceed **half** of the weekly vegetable offerings. This includes all sources of 100 percent juice served during the week juice including frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice, pureed fruits and vegetables in fruit/vegetable smoothies, and juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice, unless the canned fruit is drained. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, [Crediting Juice](#).



**GRAINS:** Schools must offer at least 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 2 oz eq daily for grades 9-12. Over the week, five-day menus must include at least 8 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 10 oz eq for grades 9-12. Seven-day menus must include at least 11 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 14 oz eq for grades 9-12. All grains must be **whole grain-rich**, i.e., the product contains at least 50 percent whole grains, any remaining grains are enriched and any noncreditable grains are less than 2 percent (¼ ounce equivalent) of the product formula. Whole grain-rich foods include 100 percent whole grains, which are the most nutritious choices. For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, [Criteria for Whole Grain-rich Foods](#) and [Identifying Whole Grains](#).



**MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATES:** Schools must offer at least 1 oz eq daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 2 oz eq daily for grades 9-12. Over the week, five-day menus must include at least 8 oz eq for grades K-5, at least 9 oz eq for grades 6-8 and at least 10 oz eq for grades 9-12. Seven-day menus must include at least 11 oz eq for grades K-5, at least 12.5 oz eq for 6-8, and at least 14 oz eq for grades 9-12. A 1-ounce equivalent serving equals 1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry or fish, 1 ounce of cheese and 2 ounces of cottage cheese (low-fat recommended), ¼ cup of cooked beans and peas (legumes), ½ large egg, 2 tablespoons of nut butters, 1 ounce of nuts or seeds, ¼ cup of commercial tofu, ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt and 1 ounce of alternate protein products (APP). Meat and meat alternates must be served in a **main dish** or a main dish and only one other food item.

## Menu Planning for the NSLP, continued



**DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS:** Menus must meet the weekly dietary specifications (**nutrition standards**) for calories, saturated fat and sodium indicated in the meal pattern. In addition, the nutrition label or manufacturer specifications for all foods and ingredients used in school meals must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving. Be aware of product nutrition information and limit noncreditable foods. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Noncreditable Foods*.



**OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS):** Schools must offer all **five components** (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates). Students must select **at least three components**, including **at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables** and the minimum daily serving of **at least two other components**. Except for the fruits and vegetables components, amounts less than the minimum serving do not count as a food component for OVS. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Offer versus Serve in the NSLP*.



**OFFERING VARIETY:** The language used on school menus and signs indicates whether choices are allowed. To offer variety, provide different choices and specify the number of items students can select (see sample menu below).

SAMPLE LUNCH MENU (GRADES 9-12)			
Each lunch includes <b>FIVE components</b> : milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates. <b>Choose AT LEAST one fruit or vegetable and TWO other components.</b>			
<b>MILK</b>  <b>CHOOSE 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low-fat (1%)</li> <li>Fat-free plain</li> <li>Fat-free chocolate</li> <li>Fat-free strawberry</li> </ul>	<b>Choose at least one serving (½ cup)</b>		<b>MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATES AND GRAINS *</b>  <b>CHOOSE 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hamburger on whole-wheat bun</li> <li>Turkey whole-grain wrap</li> <li>Baked chicken with whole grain-rich corn bread</li> <li>Southwest chili with whole-grain roll</li> </ul>
	<b>FRUITS</b>  <b>CHOOSE 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raisins</li> <li>Blueberries</li> <li>Green grapes</li> <li>Pineapple chunks</li> <li>Sliced peaches</li> <li>Banana</li> </ul>	<b>VEGETABLES</b>  <b>CHOOSE UP TO 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carrot sticks</li> <li>Broccoli florets</li> <li>Spinach salad</li> <li>Seasoned corn</li> <li>Roasted potatoes</li> <li>Green beans</li> </ul>	

\* All entrees include grains and meat/meat alternates (two components).



**SIGNAGE AND COMMUNICATION:** Schools must **identify all foods** that are part of reimbursable meals **near or at the beginning** of all serving lines. For example, if fruits are offered in ½-cup portions for grades 9-12, the serving line signage must indicate that students can select two choices. To ensure clear communication with students and staff about the meal pattern and OVS, schools must:

- **post daily lunch menus** in all schools that clearly communicate all menu choices and what students are allowed to select; and
- **provide adequate training** for school food service staff on the lunch meal pattern, including how to recognize reimbursable lunches with OVS.

For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals* and *Meal Patterns* and *Crediting Foods* Web pages or contact the *school nutrition programs* staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.



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